

“It’s All About the Climb”
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When I first listened to *The Climb* in 2009 by Miley Cyrus, I had just completed my first year of teaching and had decided to go back to school to begin my graduate degree. Every lyric of this song has played a role in my journey throughout this difficult yet very rewarding process. If you listen to the song, it is easy to understand the overall message and theme. It’s about someone who has a dream and sadly has doubts that her dream will ever come true. She feels lost and her faith is tested, but she keeps trying and understands that there will always be challenges and obstacles along the way. Sometimes, it might not work out the way you intend it to but you just have to keep trying. In the most difficult of times during my time in the MAED program here at MSU, I would listen to this song as loud as I could and remember that this process, “the climb,” is what it’s all about. It’s not about that piece of paper that I get once all of this is complete. It’s about the journey I took and everything that I learned along the way.

The journey began in the fall of 2011 with my first course, *ED 800: Concepts of Educational Inquiry*. I feel obligated to mention this course because it taught me my first lessons about who I am as a learner, educator and a person. I learned that I am dedicated, hardworking, and passionate about doing well and being successful. On the other end of things, I learned that I have a bit of an anxiety problem when it comes to due dates and deadlines, my time management could use a little work, and I had to remember that not everything has to be perfect 100% of the time. It’s okay to make mistakes and ask for help. I learned that I wasn’t alone in my feelings and others were having just as much trouble with the transition back into school as I was. While I did learn a lot about educational inquiry and explored philosophy through inspirational philosophers such as Catherine Bateson, John Dewey, and E.D. Hirsch, I

must be honest in saying that the most beneficial lessons I learned from this course were about myself and the person I was, as well as the person I wanted to become. These were very important lessons that were imperative for me to learn and I am grateful to my professor for guiding me through this course with support and confidence. There were many times I thought about giving up. It was hard to be in school full time and work full time. The balance didn't seem possible. My professor and peers helped me see that it could be done, and I couldn't be more grateful.

The next major lesson I learned within the MAED program happened in the summer of 2012 when I took *CEP 841: Classroom Management in the Inclusive Classroom*. My classroom management had always been an area of struggle for me from the moment I entered the teaching field. It was something that I struggled quite a bit with and after discussing my experiences with my peers and professor in this course, I was relieved to know that I wasn't alone. This course, along with *CEP 832: Educating Students with Challenging Behaviors* which I took in the fall of 2012, taught me my second lesson about the importance of maintaining a positive attitude and an effective teaching stance with every student in my classroom. I learned that it was okay (and normal) to get upset and frustrated when dealing with difficult and challenging students but that my reaction and response to these behaviors was directly related to the outcome of my relationships with these students. I had to gain back the power and remember that my role is to educate these students and guide them on the greatest path to success as I possibly can. These courses forced me to analyze and identify gaps in my classroom management and provided me with a plethora of tools and strategies to use to improve myself as an educator and to share with my colleagues. My projects, which included an in depth case study of a student of mine diagnosed with Oppositional Defiant Disorder as well as a

research project on the disorder itself, combined with detailed conversations and feedback from amazing instructors and peers, provided me with the confidence and determination I needed to get me through a very difficult school year. As the song says, “the struggles I’m facing; the chances I’m taking; sometimes might knock me down but; no, I’m not breaking. I may not know it, but these are the moments that; I’m gonna remember most; just gotta keep going.” My challenges within this program and within my classroom are those moments that I definitely remember most when I look back on this journey.

The next two lessons I learned relate to my evolution as an educator. Two important themes evolved from my coursework within the MAED program: the necessity of thorough, creative, and reflective literacy instruction and the essential integration of technology into all aspects of education. I will start with literacy instruction because this program has brought out a passion of mine in this area of education that I hope to explore in more detail in the near future.

There were two courses that contributed to my enthusiasm of literacy. ***TE 842: Elementary Reading Instruction and Assessment*** inspired my interest in the teaching of reading and really helped me learn more and understand concepts such as assessment, vocabulary, morphology and fluency, phonological awareness, concepts of print, letter-sound knowledge, word identification and motivation and engagement. We learned how to design a balanced elementary reading and literacy program across the curriculum. The area that I chose to explore and improve upon in my own classroom was the inclusion of a Readers Workshop with my Kindergarten class. I just recently completed my first school year with the Reader’s Workshop and although there are many areas that need improvement, the addition of the program was an extreme success. The additional knowledge that I was able to provide to my students, in

comparison to years past, was incredible and I am grateful to have had the opportunity to create this program throughout the course.

TE 836: Awards & Classics of Children's Literature taught me more about myself as a reader of children's literature and inspired me to become much more involved in book selection for not only myself, but more importantly, my students. I learned about the different children's literature awards that books are given and saw a "glimpse" into what the literature "classics" are all about, what gives them that title, and what they represent. We focused on determining what children these books are appropriate for and why as well as the intended purpose of these books, whether it is to entertain, teach, create a reaction, or a combination. This led us to our discussion on how culture and values effect how award winning books and "classics" are accepted. One of the most influential lessons I learned from this course is the common (and fitting) phrase that "you can't judge a book by its cover." Just because it has an award stamped on the front of it, does not mean it is the greatest book for children. And just because a book has never won an award, doesn't mean it isn't an amazing book that all children should experience at some point in their lives. This course awakened an excitement in me about finding new books to excite and engage my students. It taught me to really dive into not just the words of the story but the detailed elements of the illustrations because together they form the story; individually they are a mere fraction of the whole.

Before my experiences in the MAED program, technology has always been an intimidating concept of education that I have tried my hardest to stay away from. It was difficult, time consuming, and created anxiety in me because it seemed like such an enormous amount of information that needed to be learned. As the lyrics in *The Climb* discuss, there was definitely a "voice inside my head saying "you'll never reach it." Introducing technology into my personal

education career was difficult enough (especially taking on the challenge of a degree attained completely online.) Integrating this technology into my teaching career has proved to be equally challenging, but equally rewarding and exciting as well! There were two courses that were the most influential to me throughout this program that inspired me to “keep on moving; keep climbing; keep the faith” in respect to the challenge of the integration of technology.

In the summer of 2012, *CEP 850: Technology & Literacy for Children with Mild Disabilities* completely changed my views on technology in the classroom. I became excited about technology and was filled with creative ideas and questions about how best to implement the amazing things I had seen into my everyday instruction! I was able to learn about and explore a wide variety of technology to help meet the needs of students who have difficulty reading and understanding text. We researched digital text tools such as speech recognition and text to speech such as WYNN and Quicktionary Pens, online story creators such as My StoryMaker, PhotoStory, and Clicker 6, writing tools like concept mapping and word prediction software, and technology based study tools. The biggest struggle I had throughout this course, and after its completion, was understanding where to start when it came to implementing the things I had learned about into my own classroom. My professor and peers helped me to understand that I should just dive in a start with something small. So, I used a program called *PhotoStory* to create lessons that my students could listen to and interactively participate with, covering topics such as concepts of print, retelling a story, reading comprehension, illustration analysis, rhyming, and sight word recognition. It was an intimidating process filled with many successes, and an equal amount of failures. I learned a lot about what *not* to do and more about what was successful to continue. Most importantly, the fear that I felt about technology subsided and I gained a great amount of respect and excitement for the future of it within the education field.

My final course of the MAED program, *ED 870: Capstone Portfolio*, was also an integral part of my excitement and newly found inspiration in the inclusion of technology in education. This course allowed me to create a comprehensive portfolio of all of the courses and work that I have completed in my MAED program at MSU. It gave me the opportunity to look back at everything I have accomplished and reflect upon the many things that I have learned. It also encouraged me to update my resume, and create an organized, creative website that can be shared with potential employers, peers, colleagues, family and friends. In addition, I was able to work with and experience website creating software to add to my list of technological experience. This was probably the most fun I had integrating technology into my education. I have decided to create my own classroom website using what I have learned from this course. I have created a website in the past but with this new knowledge, I am excited at the possibilities of creating an updated, interactive website for my classroom parents and students.

In looking back through all of my courses of the MAED program, there is one major theme that has surfaced: *having pride in your accomplishments and never stop learning!* As I mentioned earlier, this journey was a long and bumpy one filled with challenges, moments of failure, excitement, fun, accomplishments, friendships, and inspiration. Through it all, I learned that the most important part of taking on a new challenge like this, you must believe in yourself. I am so proud of what I have accomplished over the past three years. I have worked harder than I ever thought I would have to and have sacrificed a lot to get where I am, but in the end, it has been worth every moment. “There’s always gonna be another mountain. I’m always gonna wanna make it move. Always gonna be an uphill battle. Sometimes I’m gonna have to lose. Ain’t about how fast I get there. Ain’t about what’s waiting on the other side.....It’s the climb.” I may not know exactly what is waiting on the other side but the climb has been incredible! Thanks to

MSU and their phenomenal program and team of professionals that have helped me to reach my dream!